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## COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND THE SOUTHERN STATES\*

### I.

In any form of monarchy the primary object of education has been to make good, intelligent, loyal subjects. In a democracy, such as ours, the primary object of education is to make good, intelligent, loyal sovereigns. We are admittedly making "the most stupendous experiment in government" that the world has ever seen. We are making of every man a citizen, clothing him with the power to make and to administer the laws of a great nation, and to direct and control all the forces and resources of our institutional life. To cope successfully with so gigantic a problem requires intelligence and training of the highest order known to men. If our government is to endure, if it is to achieve that eminence among the powers of the earth to which we pledge our faith, it must secure to itself an intelligent, prosperous, and orderly citizenship. Intelligence and virtue lie at the very foundation of any people's greatness; intelligent and virtuous citizens are a State's fundamental asset, and the State which has the largest percentage of illiteracy has relatively the smallest percentage of effective citizens.

It would be exceedingly difficult to reduce the virtues of any two peoples to a common denominator, and no less difficult to do so with the native intelligence of any two peoples, but it is not difficult to measure the illiteracy of any people, to discover if it can be reduced or removed, and to realize the results of its removal. Let us look at our illiteracy and analyze it. Coming from the South, I ask the attention of the South, where we have

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\*The increased interest in this subject leads us to add two further papers to its discussion already offered in the January SEWANEE REVIEW by Mr. George F. Milton, editor of the Knoxville, Tenn., *Sentinel*. These papers are respectively by the Professor of Secondary Education in the University of South Carolina, read before the National Conference for Charities and Corrections May 10, in Richmond, Va., and by the editor of the Mobile, Ala., *Register*, read before the Conference for Education in the South April 24, in Memphis, Tenn. These problems are not confined to any locality, but apply to all the States.—THE EDITOR.

persistently refused to enact compulsory attendance laws as have been enacted by practically every other State in the Union, and by the majority of the leading culture lands of the world. These other States and countries have had their compulsory laws long enough to test their efficiency and their value. Let us compare results, confining ourselves to that part of our population which furnishes the safest standard — the native whites.

TABLE A — Native white illiterates over ten years of age:

North Atlantic Division, all under compulsory laws.....	1.6 per cent.
North Central Division, all under compulsory laws.....	2.3 per cent.
Western Division, all under compulsory laws.....	2.7 per cent.
South Atlantic Division, all but three without compulsory laws.....	11.4 per cent. <sup>1</sup>
South Central Division, nearly all without compulsory laws....	11.2 per cent.
Southern States alone, all without compulsory laws, 959,790, or	12.4 per cent.

TABLE B — Showing the rank of each Southern State in the percentage of illiteracy of native whites ten years of age and over:

Texas (highest in rank).....	35th	Kentucky.....	43rd
Mississippi.....	37th	South Carolina.....	44th
Florida.....	38th	Tennessee.....	46th
Virginia.....	40th	Alabama.....	47th
Arkansas.....	41st	Louisiana.....	48th
Georgia.....	42nd	North Carolina.....	49th

TABLE C — Native whites of voting age:

North Atlantic Division.....	2.1 per cent.
North Central Division.....	3.5 per cent.
Western Division.....	2.8 per cent.
South Atlantic Division.....	12.2 per cent.
South Central Division.....	11.5 per cent.
Southern States alone, 307,236 persons, or.....	12.2 per cent.
France (male adults).....	4.7 per cent.
England (male and female adults).....	3.0 per cent.
Scotland (male and female adults).....	2.4 per cent.
German Empire (male adults).....	.5 per cent.

These figures can have but one meaning — that compulsory education reduces illiteracy, and that the South sorely needs to

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<sup>1</sup> In 1907 North Carolina passed a local option compulsory law. So far it is effective in only a few small areas, and has not had time to show results.

have her illiteracy reduced. No sound-thinking man would for a moment claim that education, in the common acceptance of that term, is a panacea for political and social ills, nor can it be said that an illiterate man is necessarily not a good citizen. But in a democracy where manhood suffrage prevails, institutional life must suffer when twelve per cent of the voting population is unable to read even the names printed upon the ballots which they are supposed to cast intelligently for the government of the State. Ignorance stands for narrowness, bigotry, selfishness, and stagnation; intelligence stands for liberty, liberality, tolerance, sympathy, and growth.

The claim is repeatedly made that the younger generation of whites in the South is going to school. That is not true. Statistics show that in 1900 the South Atlantic States had 2,472,895 white children between the ages of five and twenty years. The school attendance for the same year shows 1,176,976 white children in school, or more children out of school than were in school. Of course, allowance must be made for a considerable number between five and six, not entitled to enter the public schools. The same statistics show that the Southern States had 262,590 native white illiterates between the ages of ten and nineteen, Virginia alone contributing 23,108, while Ohio had but 4,083, and Minnesota but 242.

The opponents of compulsory education tell us that our people will send their children to school without being compelled to do so, if they are only shown their duty and their obligation to their children. For nearly twenty years our ablest and safest leaders, men and women, have been tireless in their efforts to get the children of the South into the schools. Yet more than twenty-five per cent of the native white children between ten and fourteen, that crucial age, are not in school at all.

I know that there are among us many who contend that the educational conditions in the South are subjects for congratulation. I yield to no one in the matter of pride over what the South has done in the past forty years. To me it is a source of constant delight to see and hear the many reports of excellent educational progress in the Southern States. Increased taxation for schools, new buildings, large equipment, longer school

terms, and better paid teachers occupy enviable places in all these pictures. But how many of these reports dare to mention a substantial decrease in illiteracy? Increased enrollment and increased attendance do not necessarily prove decreased illiteracy. The increased enrollment and the increased attendance do not always keep pace with the increase in population. The truth is that in some of the Southern States the total white illiteracy has remained practically unchanged for thirty years. Of what value are all your taxes, and your elegant school buildings, and your improved schools, to your thousands of boys and girls who never enter a school?

Southern people, are we willing to permit twenty-five per cent of our young white boys and girls to grow up in the bondage of illiteracy? Can we afford to thrust 262,590 illiterate white boys and girls at the age of sixteen out into a world enriched by the progress in the arts and sciences reaching back over a century itself rich in discoveries and inventions? How can we expect them to win with untrained hands and vagrant minds? Poverty and stress of war can no longer be urged as a palliative for the illiteracy of the children who ought to be in school to-day. Many of these children are the descendants of Walter Page's *forgotten men*. They became the *neglected mass*; and the neglected mass has in turn become the *indifferent mass*. When any considerable number of people in a State become indifferent to the intellectual, and moral, and social conditions of themselves and their offspring, the situation becomes alarming, for illiteracy, like every other evil, tends toward perpetuating itself.

Has the State the right to compel a child to go to school? What is the answer to this question? Years ago we accepted, without much question, the doctrine that popular education is necessary to the growth and permanence of our republican institutions. Since all classes of our heterogeneous society are active factors, the State maintains schools for all the children of all the people. The schools exist primarily for the benefit of the State, rather than for the benefit of the individual. The State seeks to make every citizen intelligent and serviceable. The State compels the rich man to pay taxes to support the schools, not because he owes the poor man an education but be-

cause the State needs the intelligent services of that child. The schools are democratized by compelling the rich and the poor alike to pay taxes according to their ability for something necessary to all.

When the State has provided schools for all the children, it has performed only a part of its duty. If a school tax is justifiable on the ground that popular education is a necessity, it follows that compulsory attendance by the State is also justifiable. The State has no right to levy and collect taxes for a specific purpose, then permit that purpose to be defeated at the hand of indifferent or selfish parents. In this connection we hear much about the sacred rights and personal privileges of the parent who neglects or refuses to send his child to school. No one regrets more than I do the tendency to shift from the home the functions which properly belong there. One of those functions is to train the children for their duties and responsibilities in the social organism. Society itself is imperiled whenever its members are unfitted. One of the essentials of fitness is what we call education. Therefore, whenever the home refuses or neglects to prepare the child for society, it is not only the privilege but the duty of the State to see that the child is fitted for his part. Argument against the right of the State to send a child to school is specious and superficial. Those who make such argument would not for one moment deny the right of the State to compel the parent to feed and clothe his child, or to compel him to fight for his country, and to shoot him if he deserted. The State has the right to carry the law-breaking child to the reformatory or to the jail to protect society. Has not the State as much right to carry the child to the school house to save him from the reformatory or the jail, and to train him to benefit society? Those who deny the right of the State to compel the parent to send his child to school are too frequently the offending parents themselves, or those who fear unpopularity at the hands of the voting mob.

When the State compels the parent to send his child to school, it is simply compelling the parent to put the child in possession of his own rightful inheritance. In a narrow sense that inheritance is his right to the benefit of what the State has col-

lected and set apart for him; a wider and truer sense it means his opportunity to make of himself all that his God-given abilities will permit him to become; in a still wider sense it is his becoming fitted to take his place in the State to perform the sacred duties of an intelligent citizen in the broadest meaning of that term.

Objection is often made that compulsory attendance would work hardships in the homes of the poor. Is it not a fact that the poor child is the very one who most needs the aid of the State to bring him into possession of his own? He it is who must soon face the complexities of modern life and the insistent demands of citizenship with none of the advantages common to birth or wealth. He is the very one whom the State ought to help, because he himself is helpless. The child of the poor must work, and it is right that he should work, but it is neither right nor humane that he should be forever denied his share in his inheritance in order to be made a bread-winner for a lazy, selfish, unfeeling father, as is so frequently the case.

Over and over we are told that compulsory laws could not be successfully enforced. To my mind that is begging the question. Why not the same skepticism about the enforcement of any other law? The opponents insist that a compulsory law could not be enforced, because the people are not ready for such a law. Would there be any use for this law, or any other law if all the people were ready and waiting to obey it? Laws are enacted to compel men to do that which they ought to do but will not do voluntarily. Tens of thousands of people in America are not obeying the Ten Commandments. Are we to justify this disobedience on the ground that the people are not quite ready for the Decalogue? Or is the Decalogue a piece of unwise and premature legislation, because some of us do not obey it? Will any law enforce itself? Will any law be enforced until an honest effort has been made to do so? And what is meant by successful enforcement? Can the enforcement of a law be called unsuccessful so long as it is violated by anyone? In every civilized land there is law against homicide. There are many violations of that law. Shall we say that the law is not a success? Shall we repeal the law until violations of it cease?

It is further argued that a child forced to attend school will derive but little benefit from the school. Those who argue thus forget that the compulsion is not in bringing to school the unwilling child, but in forcing an indifferent, selfish, heartless parent to let his child go to school.

Another contention is that compulsory laws could not be enforced without truant officers, and that such officers must be paid out of the school funds. I at once admit the necessity of the truant officer, and that he must be paid. The city of Richmond would no doubt save thousands of dollars every year in the way of salaries, if it would dismiss its policemen, its constables, and its detectives. But these officers are necessary to perform for the people services more valuable than the amount of their salaries. So it is with the truant officer.

In some sections of the South serious objection is made to compulsory attendance by sincere but shortsighted people on the ground that a compulsory law would enforce an increased attendance of the negro children as well as the white children. Such objection has in it several elements of weakness. Those who offer the negro as an objection overlook the fact that the negro parent needs such a law less than the white parent needs it. Be it said to our shame that the negro is sending his child to school with an eagerness than challenges our admiration. Considering the negro's opportunity he is sending his child to school well, and throughout the South the percentage of illiteracy among the negroes is decreasing more rapidly than among the whites.

The weakness of the main argument against compulsory attendance on account of the negro is truly pathetic. Is it wise or expedient to permit thousands of our white boys and girls to grow up in ignorance, lest in forcing them to school we should awaken the aspirations of the negro child? Shall we remain ignorant in order to encourage him to remain ignorant? Is it better for white and black to remain ignorant than to have white and black made intelligent? The only logical conclusion to such argument is that an ignorant white man can compete successfully with an ignorant negro, but that an educated white man can not compete with an educated negro. Then what becomes of our boasted superiority of the white man? Has the white man



so nearly reached the zenith of his possibilities that further education will not keep him well in advance of the ambitious negro? But we are reminded that the increased attendance of the negro means additional weight to the present white man's burden. I freely admit this; but it must be remembered that ignorance is the heaviest burden which the whites of the South have borne during the past forty years. I know only too well what that burden is to-day; but our very existence is wrapped up in this question. No matter how great was the blunder, to him and to us, in making the negro a citizen without one day's preparation, no matter how inferior a citizen he has been in the past, no matter how unsatisfactory have been the results of his schooling, wisdom and prudence bid us look resolutely toward the future, and to improve upon the past.

Not only is it the duty of the State to maintain schools for the children, and to require them to attend the schools, but it is the imperative duty of the State to provide the right kind of schools, and the right kind of education. Ideal schools and bonuses offered for good attendance will never, in my opinion, make a school system so alluring as to bring into the schools the children of grasping, heartless parents. The children of such parents are in bondage—the bondage of ignorance, and indifference, and greed, and stifling cupidity. Yet it is perfectly reasonable to say that our schools would be better attended if they were more efficient. By efficiency I mean adaptation to the actual needs of the pupils. The schools of the people, especially above the primary grades, are the schools of the middle ages, and need reconstruction, readjustment, and rearticulation, to meet the demands of the twentieth century conditions and ideals.

Perhaps the greatest defect in our schools is their failure to inculcate a taste and appreciation for work. To me it is no wonder that the ignorant laboring man who refuses to send his child to school claims that he prefers to teach his child to work, because his child must work when he leaves school. That man feels that his child would not have instilled into him any love for toil.

Men of the South, it is high time to end our specious arguments, to quit our scholastic quibbling, and throw aside our

political sophistries. We know the facts, we know the situation, we ought to know our duty.

WILLIAM H. HAND.

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## II.

Education is the surest remedy for those conditions existing in the South that are obstacles to our social and material progress.

If ignorance stands in the way of the creation of a sound public sentiment and moral and industrial progress, it is our duty to banish it. Yet it is a fact that a considerable proportion of the children of school age do not go to school. This is our problem: Ignorance on the one hand and inadequate effort on the other. If a considerable proportion of the young of our country do not go to school, and reach man's estate without knowing how to read and write, we have a continuing basis of illiteracy; and this problem that now confronts us will merely be pushed along to the next generation, unsolved.

We must have compulsory education — the only means whereby the South can be saved from illiteracy.

We all agree in this opinion, and some here to-day will speak with enthusiasm of it, as not only desirable but at command. We must, however, face the difficulties. I think we gain nothing by avoiding them, but rather retard progress. I stand here, therefore, asking you to look the matter in the face and say whether or to what extent we may have compulsory education in the South.

Some who are unacquainted with the conditions think that all that is necessary is to build the schools and pass the laws, and then we will have compulsory education. The little question of paying for the improvements is passed as trivial. Nevertheless, it is a serious question in the South, where a notable portion of the population is not self-supporting in an educational way, and has to be supported by the other portion that has already its own children to look after.

Take the county of Dallas, in my own State of Alabama, as

an example. According to the Census of 1900 there were less than 10,000 white inhabitants in that county, and 45,000 blacks. This, with compulsory education, means that some 4,000 white adults must not only educate their own children, but the children of some 15,000 adult blacks. The burden would be heavier than those few white citizens could bear, even were they willing to undertake it.

Then as to Alabama. There were in Alabama, as per this 1900 Census, 733,000 children of school age, from five to twenty years; 394,000 white and 338,000 blacks. Now, as seven years is the usual school life of children, the possible enrollment would be 370,000. The number of children who attended school in 1900 is recorded as 161,000 whites and 78,000 colored, total 240,000, or fifty-five per cent, leaving forty-five per cent attending no school and growing up in ignorance.

This was the situation in 1900, and there has been steady progress since that date in increasing educational facilities, and in increasing general interest in the schools. The formation of School Improvement Associations, the holding of elections to vote special taxes in support of the schools, and the Acts of the Legislature appropriating for high schools and for primary and other schools, have caused people to think more about education and this has brought about increased attendance. There has also been an increase of population. It is probable that a larger proportion than fifty-five per cent now attends the schools; and we hazard little in saying that sixty per cent does so attend.

Coming to the practical question, we note that Alabama has in recent years shown much interest in education and has greatly increased her appropriation for public schools. Directly, the State has appropriated \$1,500,000 for public schools, and this does not include what is derived from the special tax levied in forty-seven counties, or the aid given by municipalities. The total is in the neighborhood of \$2,000,000. Now, if \$2,000,000 pays for the schooling of between fifty and sixty per cent of the school population, we see that at least twice that amount, or \$4,000,000 will be needed to provide schools and teachers for the whole population. State Superintendent Gunnels recently boasted of what Alabama was doing for education, and it is a

plain inference that, in the opinion of this well-informed public servant, Alabama is doing much and is making a highly creditable effort. May we expect the people of the State to do twice as much? We do not say that they cannot do it, but will they do it?

It appears to be largely a question of educating the public to the accomplishment of an ideal, and it is for this sort of work we are here, hoping to create in some measure a public sentiment in favor of increased appropriation, more schools, and better facilities for obtaining education in the South.

There are other difficulties also, such as inadequate road system, indisposition of the blacks to put their children in school when the children are needed in the fields — a strong sentiment on their part against compulsory education would have to be overcome.

This subject was given attention and thorough discussion last December in a meeting of State Superintendents and other educators in Atlanta, Ga., under the auspices of the Southern Education Board, but no conclusion was reached other than the adoption of a resolution as to compulsory attendance, reading: "Increased attendance by urging the importance of education, and, also, by conservative legal requirement in such communities as are prepared for this."

In the meantime, what is to be done besides the creation of public sentiment? The most valuable suggestion has come from Florida, where a plan is in force, extending the school term for two months in all schools that show eighty per cent and over of attendance. Some five hundred schools have earned this reward, and the additional expense to the State is but \$60,000 per annum. This is the nearest approach in a Southern State to compulsory attendance — it is not compulsory at all, of course, but induced attendance. It does not force the children into the schools, it leads them; and that is what we can all do. We have not the money as yet to require all to attend school, but we can lead them more and more, until there will be so many inside that we can afford to provide compulsory attendance for the small remainder. I earnestly hope that this may be accomplished soon.

ERWIN CRAIGHEAD.

Mobile, Alabama.